NAPA VALLEY: CLIMATE ALERT HOW INVASIVE SPECIES GET HERE

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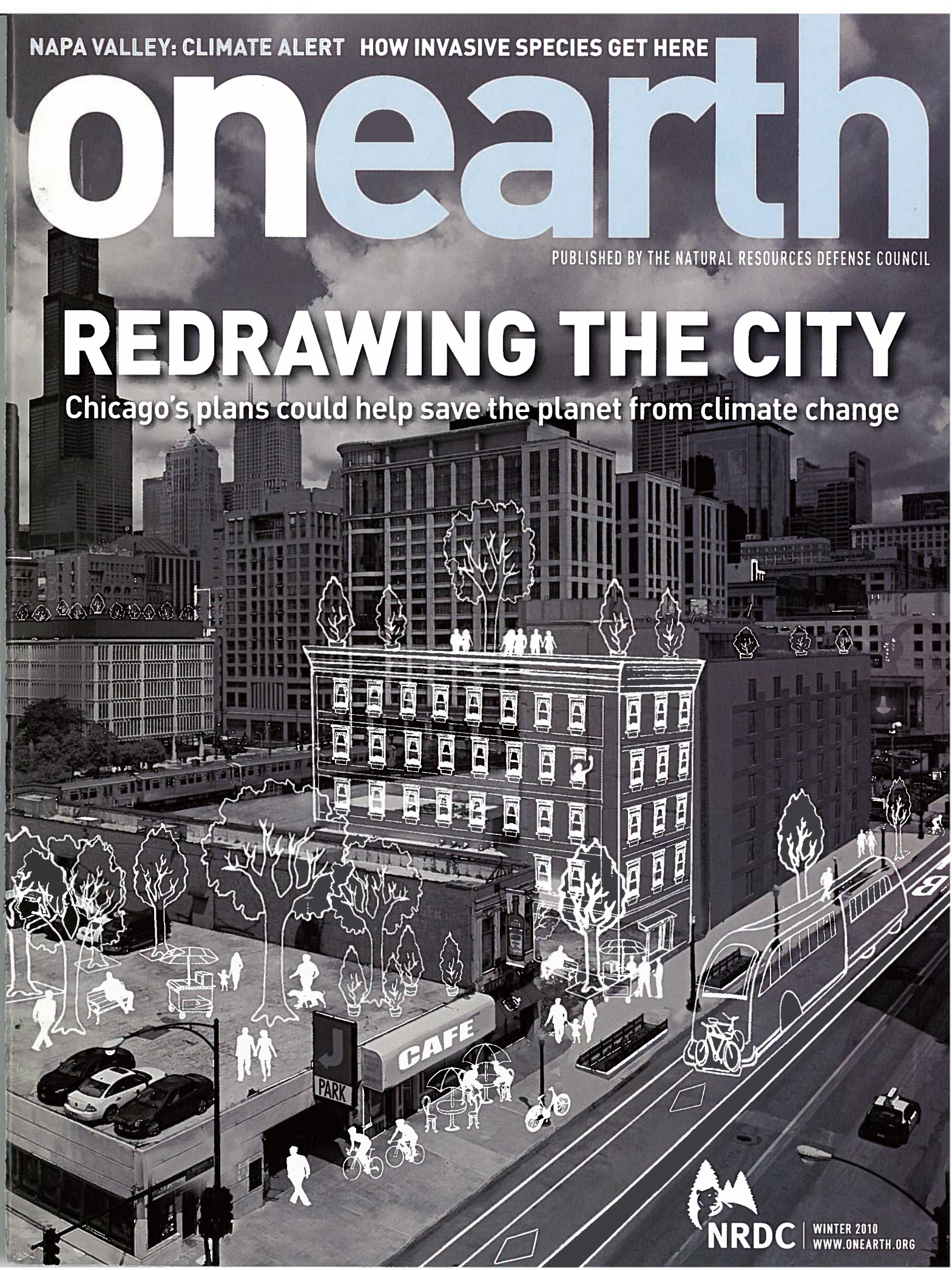
REDRAWING THE CITY

Chicago's plans could help save the planet from climate change



NRDC | WINTER 2010
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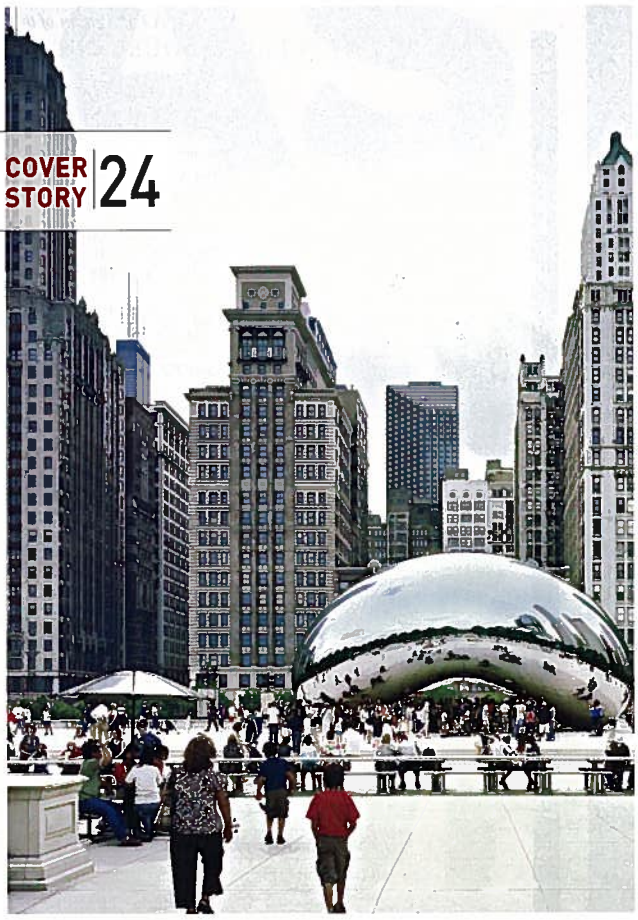


Better known as the Bean, Chicago's Cloud Gate sculpture was completed in 2006. The 110-ton stainless steel structure stands in Millennium Park as a gateway to the modern metropolis.

Redrawing the (American) City

by Laura Wright

In their quest to rein in sprawl and create a more livable metropolis, Chicago's city planners are working to solve a multitude of ills, from time and energy wasted in traffic and lost economic productivity to the biggest problem of all: climate change.

On the cover: Photograph by Ofer Wolberger; illustration by Craig LaRotonda

DEPARTMENTS

INSIDE NRDC

REDRAWING THE CITY

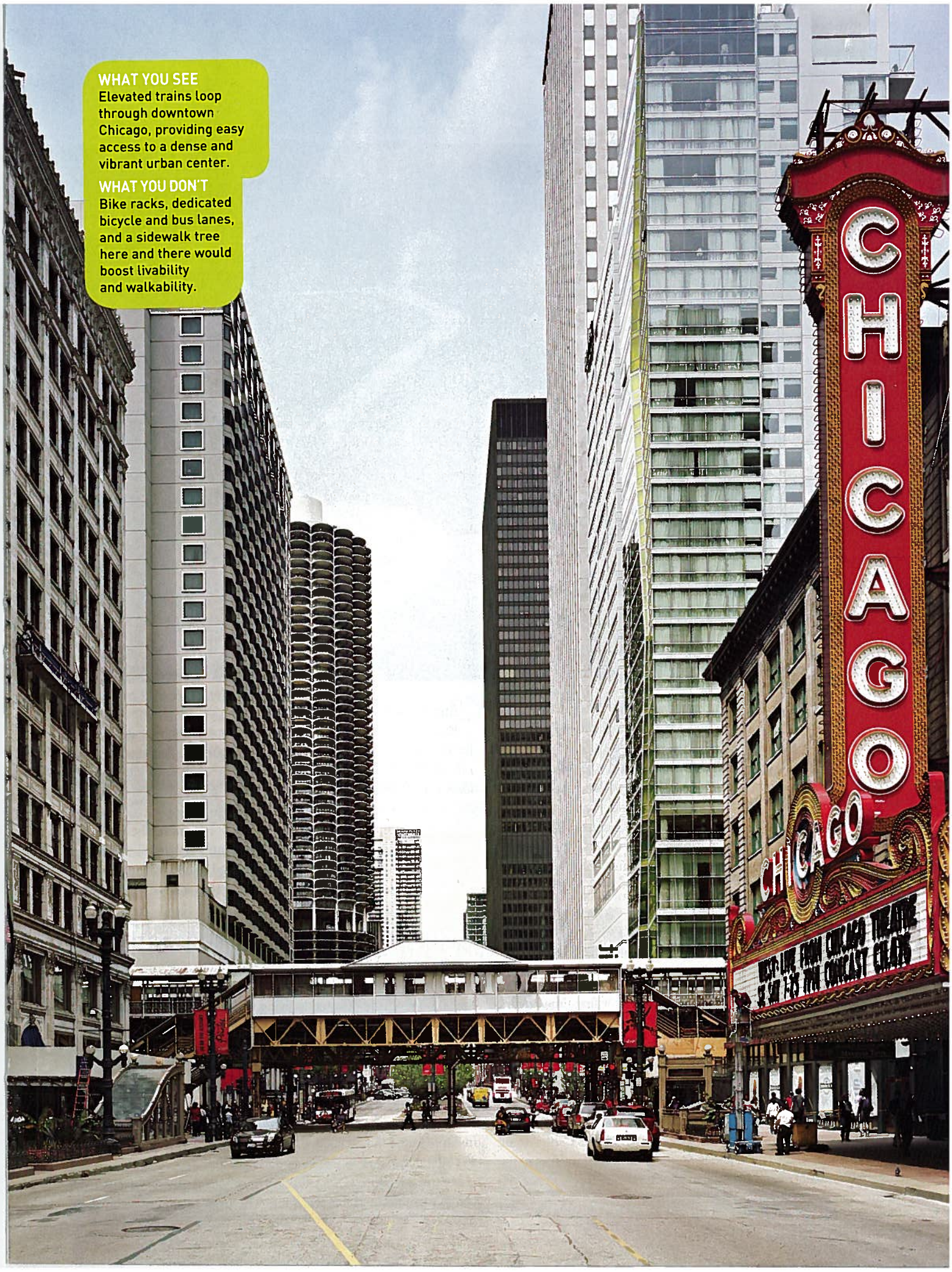
American

BY LAURA WRIGHT

ON A WARM, SUNNY DAY IN JULY, I TOOK A RIDE TO THE TOP OF THE SEARS TOWER in Chicago. By coincidence, it happened to be just a few days after the city's most distinctive landmark was officially renamed. It's now called the Willis Tower, for a London-based insurance company that acquired the naming rights. I had come to Chicago to contemplate urban sprawl, so the timing seemed symbolic: Sears began to lay plans for the tower in the 1960s and built it in the early 1970s, back when major corporations still saw our historic city centers as the real seats of power. But that would change, and by 1989 Sears was planning to build a sprawling, 786-acre office park some 33 miles northwest of downtown, in a suburb called Hoffman Estates.

Hoffman Estates did not exist at all until 1954, when the father-and-son

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OFER WOLBERGER



WHAT YOU SEE
Elevated trains loop through downtown Chicago, providing easy access to a dense and vibrant urban center.

WHAT YOU DON'T
Bike racks, dedicated bicycle and bus lanes, and a sidewalk tree here and there would boost livability and walkability.

WHAT YOU SEE
Compact, energy-efficient homes on small lots, native plantings, bike trails, and shared open space.

WHAT YOU DON'T
Prairie Crossing lacks sidewalks, except in Station Square, where shops and condos are clustered near the train to Chicago.

team of Sam and Jack Hoffman bought a 160-acre farm in rural Cook County and subdivided it into half-acre lots, on which they built hundreds of modest, single-family homes. Their timing was excellent. The federal government had just begun a 79-mile extension of Interstate 90 from Chicago's O'Hare airport to Rockford, Illinois, passing right by their new plots. The tollway opened in 1958, the same year that O'Hare's international terminal opened, kicking off a multiyear expansion project that would turn a tiny military airstrip into the world's busiest airport.

In 1959 the community's residents, then numbering 8,000, voted to incorporate as Hoffman Estates, and after that the Hoffmans kept on building, mass-producing affordable homes for first-time buyers, slapping up as many as four a day. Within 10 years the population of the town had nearly tripled. Today it has some 53,000 residents plus its corporate citizens, which include not only Sears but also AT&T, GE Capital, Siemens Medical Systems, and Mary Kay cosmetics. Along the way, Hoffman Estates sprouted all the trappings of a full-fledged suburban town: a shopping mall (built in 1971), eight major hotel chains, and a sports and recreation complex, the Sears Center (built in 2006), which seats 11,000 and is home to the Chicago Bliss of the Lingerie Football League (women in bikinis playing football) and the Xtreme Soccer League's Chicago Slaughter.

And so goes the story of sprawl in America.

But the point is not to vilify the Hoffmans or their estates. Across the nation, everyone was up to the same game. Our homes and stores, many of which had been compact and concentrated in cities and villages, were streaming out into subdivisions and malls, each one farther out in the cornfields than the last. Our offices moved out too: between 1970 and the mid-1990s, the proportion of commercial office space located in suburbia jumped from one-quarter to two-thirds. During those years America also gave birth to the big-box store, the indoor shopping mall, and the McMansion. Since the close of World War II, the amount of land devoted to living and shopping in this nation has more than doubled on a per capita basis.

CITIES WERE STREAMING OUT INTO SUBDIVISIONS, EACH ONE FARTHER OUT IN THE CORNFIELDS

In the process, the automobile became an indispensable part of accomplishing a day's work and play: between 1970 and 1990, personal car use increased twofold. By the century's end, American mothers were spending at least an hour of each day behind the wheel, spread out over five or more trips. Researchers at the Texas Transportation Institute found that in 2004, the time we spent stuck in traffic cost us $63 billion in lost productivity and wasted fuel.

Meanwhile, sprawl was stoking another, distinctly twenty-first-century problem: global warming. The urge to supersize our new

suburban homes, offices, schools, and shops led to ballooning energy consumption: indoor malls, superstores, and mega-mansions have far more space to heat, cool, light, and power up than the small downtown shops and apartments back in the city. The new roads we built had no sidewalks, and there was no mass transit; the only way to get to and fro was the family car. One of the greatest obstacles we now face in curbing greenhouse gas emissions is that our vehicle miles traveled, or VMT, are projected to grow at a rate that outstrips our ability to compensate through improved auto efficiency.

There is an antidote. It's called smart growth, and it is everything that sprawl is not. Smart growth is in some ways a lesson in recycling writ large. In this case it's not plastic that gets a new life but the old infrastructure and buildings that we have, in many cases, allowed to fall into disrepair. Urban renewal is part of that equation, but it also means giving the suburb a face-lift, adding sidewalks, bike lanes and racks, buses, and commuter trains, making it possible to leave the car keys at home. Following the logic of smart growth, when we build new we build in, not out: office buildings, homes, and stores go in the spaces that exist within the areas we've already developed, not out on the fringe where they gobble up farmland and countryside. This makes it possible for more people to utilize the infrastructure that currently exists; we spend taxpayer dollars to keep it in working order, rather than build anew. Smart growth is all about efficiency.

But how, exactly, do we apply these principles to a giant, snarled metropolis like Chicago? On a clear day you can see for 50 miles from the sky deck of the Willis Tower, a vista that encompasses nearly all of Chicagoland, the 4,071-square-mile metropolitan region that includes 284 municipalities and seven counties, all the way to Indiana and Wisconsin. The view contains some depressing reminders of why so many of us fled to suburbia in the first place. Things were broken. Crime, poverty, and the loss of industrial jobs left many cities in tatters. From the top of the Willis Tower, the remains of that reality are in full view in the empty rail yards and defunct train bridges that lie to the south.

But the new future is visible too. Between the tower and Lake Michigan, patches of green emerge among the skyscrapers—the city's new Millennium Park, a leafy plaza where city dwellers can dine at the Park Grill restaurant, catch a concert at the Pritzker Pavilion, stroll among white oak and flowering cherry trees, or picnic in a quiet spot near the water. What's interesting about the park is where it was built: atop a century-old rail yard that still functions as a commuter and city transit terminal. In 1998 city planners decided that this was a good location to build in, putting places for play a stone's throw from the places where Chicagoans work, which are increasingly where they live, too.

Chicago's urban planners have always had the sense of standing on the shoulders of giants. After all, this was the home of the architect Daniel Burnham, creator of the vaunted White City, site of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, as well as author of the visionary 1909 Plan of Chicago, which Chicagoans feted on its 100th birthday this past year. "Make no small plans," Burnham famously said. Groups like the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and the civic-minded business organization Chicago Metropolis 2020 have set themselves a correspondingly ambitious goal. They understand that to accommodate the 2.8 million people expected to join Chicagoland's 9.4 million residents by 2040, they will need to reverse sprawl and make creative use of the existing infrastructure, whether it's in newer subdivisions or run-down inner-city neighborhoods. What may appear at first to be evidence of urban blight—empty factories, abandoned railroads, deteriorating housing stock—is also a huge potential asset, and that is true not only of Chicago but also of most American cities.

I traveled back and forth across Chicagoland, covering hundreds of miles by train, by car, and on foot, in search of places that reveal how these ideas might actually work. Three very different communities stood out: Prairie Crossing, an eco-minded development out on the suburban fringe; Blue Island, a down-and-out blue-collar suburb in the region's industrial wasteland; and West Garfield Park, a poor and predominantly black neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago. Each one has laid plans for some strategic improvements, based on a simple principle: always begin with the stuff you've already got.

PRAIRIE CROSSING

In the northwestern corner of Chicagoland, some 20 miles north of Hoffman Estates, lies the community of Prairie Crossing. Getting here on the Metra commuter train from downtown Chicago takes about an hour and 20 minutes. City folk refer to the area as "the country," but when I get there, I find that working farms and forest preserves are outnumbered by roadside mini-marts, strip malls, and midcentury subdivisions.

Back in the early 1970s, sprawl reached the doorstep of the Ranney family in Grayslake, Illinois: a 1,600-home subdivision was being planned on the site of what was then a 677-acre farm. Alarmed by the rate at which farmland was disappearing, George Ranney and his uncle,

NRDC: SMART GROWTH MATTERS

ONEARTH SPOKE TO KAID BENFIELD, THE DIRECTOR OF NRDC's smart growth program and a driving force behind the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED-ND program, which rates new developments on their smart growth bona fides. He also blogs about community development and the environment at *switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/kbenfield*

REDEVELOPING URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS CAN DISPLACE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES. HOW DO WE AVOID THAT?
Planners and developers should be working with existing residents from the start to produce mixed-income neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and prices.

YOU'VE BEEN ASKED TO HELP REVITALIZE AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD IN INDIANAPOLIS. HOW DOES THAT BEGIN?
By listening to residents' aspirations for their community. Then we help them create and weigh different strategies to get there. We have to be very candid about the trade-offs. If the community wants a new supermarket, it must welcome enough new residents to keep the store in business. By building new homes on abandoned lots, including some apartments and condos where decaying industrial buildings now stand, the neighborhood can accommodate the newcomers without disturbing existing single-family homes. That's important to current residents.

For more, go to *onearth.org/article/smartgrowthchicagoQA*

WHAT YOU SEE
Blue Island's historic building stock mixes commercial spaces and residences, with sidewalks to boot.

WHAT YOU DON'T
Trees, benches, bustling shops and restaurants—features that make main street a place you'd like to be.

Gaylord Donnelley, rounded up the neighbors—farmers, owners of country estates, people who cared about preserving agricultural and wild lands—to stop the development. It worked, and they eventually bought the site themselves. But that led to a new problem: no government agency wanted to buy and conserve the land (one county official thought it might make a good landfill), leaving them with what was then a $5 million property. So they began drafting plans to develop it themselves. But they would not create the usual sort of housing subdivision. They would build a community that stood in opposition to suburban sprawl, one with a conservation ethic, environmental protections, and agricultural stewardship at its core.

The first of Prairie Crossing's 359 single-family homes went up in 1994, built in accordance with the Environmental Protection Agency's Building America energy-efficiency standards. This was before the advent of LEED ratings, the now ubiquitous system established by the U.S. Green Building Council and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The development's traditional farmhouses are rendered in Crayola's most tasteful, grown-up hues—burnt sienna, goldenrod, forest green—and arranged neatly around village greens and along small culs-de-sac on lots of about one-third of an acre. They use less than half as much energy as an average home of comparable size. The vast majority of the original parcel is set aside as farmland and permanent open space, which residents and visitors can explore on a 10–mile network of trails suitable for walking, running, biking, and horseback riding.

In 1995 Ranney hired Mike Sands, who was then managing director of the Rodale Institute, a nonprofit organic farming research and advocacy group based in Pennsylvania. Sands planned a series of organic farms on the 677-acre parcel, including one 40-acre commercial farm that generates about $400,000 in revenue a year. He has graying, curly hair, a husky build, and an always-on-the-go nature, which is immediately apparent as he takes me on a bike tour to see Prairie Crossing's native plantings. He points out a series of shallow ditches, or swales, that channel the water that runs off roads, rooftops, and driveways and filter it through the soil and plant roots. The water in turn feeds the wetlands that surround Lake Aldo Leopold, named for the Midwest's most famous twentieth-century conservationist. All of this is part of Sands's pioneering plan to preserve green space and lessen the burden on local stormwater management systems, which require a lot of energy and are nearing maximum capacity in many American cities and towns. The strategy, known as green infrastructure, has since been adapted to suit the needs of countless locales, from downtown Chicago to New York City and beyond.

Leaving Sands, I pedal over to the latest phase of Prairie Crossing's development—Station Square, a cluster of bold yellow and red low-rise buildings that surround a nascent town square. As I approach, the single-family homes start getting closer together, though they are no less quaint, with flowering yards and American flags flapping in the breeze. I feel slightly dazed by the deliberateness of it all, as if I've been beamed down onto the set of Jim Carrey's comedy *The Truman Show*, which was filmed in a real-life development called Seaside in Walton County, Florida. Built 13 years before Prairie Crossing, Seaside is

widely regarded as the first master-planned New Urbanist community. As the name suggests, New Urbanism's goal is to transplant desirable urban qualities—compact dwellings in close proximity to shopping and services—into a new setting.

Smart growth embraces those principles and adds an essential ingredient: recycling elements of the existing built environment. With its condominium residences, shops, and train access, Station Square is an attempt to fill in the missing pieces of a functional, walkable, quasi-urban environment. Those attributes earned Station Square a spot in the pilot phase of LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND), which scores smart growth developments on criteria that include creating density; making use of existing infrastructure and transportation networks; intermingling residential and commercial spaces to provide walkable access to goods, services, and entertainment; and reducing energy consumption. Where before there had been an empty parcel of land between Prairie Crossing's single-family homes and the Metra train lines, a shiny new "downtown" has been born. Unfortunately, the dragging economy has meant a slow start for Station Square. Many businesses have closed during the past year, and I walk by empty storefronts that look too new to have already seen tenants come and go.

I eventually come upon Paper Stories, which Kelly Maron, one of the owners, describes as "an eco-friendly paper boutique and work space" selling high-end stationery. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows I can see a printing press, a hulking antique built in 1926 by Chandler & Price, which Maron affectionately calls Chandy P., or sometimes just "the behemoth."

Maron, a former high school art teacher with a cherubic face and retro horn-rimmed glasses, is in the process of relocating her work and her home to Prairie Crossing. Step one was to open the shop. Step two is to sell the house in nearby Des Plaines, Illinois, which involves some finger-crossing for the real estate market to pick up. Step three: buy a small, single-family home in Prairie Crossing. What she hopes to find here is a blend of the everything-at-your-fingertips life she loves about the city with the affordability of the suburbs and easy access to open space. A downtown area more compact, walkable, and culturally diverse than the suburbs of a generation ago, combined with immediate access to two of Chicago's commuter rail lines, should give Maron everything she is looking for—and all without using her car.

Maron's landlord is Ben Ranney, the principal of the Chicago-based green development company Terra Firma and the son of George and Vicki Ranney. Terra Firma is the primary developer for Station Square, and Ranney also hopes to develop vacant parcels of land immediately adjacent to the train station.

Most of the retail spaces opened in 2007, and all but one of the dozen shops quickly filled with businesses offering the types of goods and services that you might need after hopping off the train at the end of the workday or on the weekend: a café, a bookstore, a children's toy store, a yoga studio, and a knitting shop.

Maron and her business partner, Tami Rasmussen, who has her own line of stationery, are precisely the sort of tenants Ben Ranney wants. They don't just sell stuff; they also enrich the community by offering classes and workshops in their studio. The knitting shop next door does the same. To get the right mix, Ranney says he's prepared to make economic concessions. The nursery school, for example, cannot pay full market rent, but it provides the kind of service that a real village ought to offer.

The downturn in the economy is only one obstacle. Looking south, across the main road that borders Station Square, the plot of land between the two Metra rail lines sits vacant. Although it's owned by Prairie Crossing's developers, it lies outside Grayslake in the village of Libertyville and is not zoned for the dense, multipurpose development that makes for a bustling center of pedestrian activity. That's what Terra Firma needs to fully connect the community's fledgling downtown with the train station. A shift on Libertyville's zoning board might change that, but for now only retail and commercial use is allowed. If Terra Firma wants to build the smart growth way, mixing residential and retail, the land next to the train station will have to wait.

BLUE ISLAND

On the southern edge of Chicago, a very different sort of community has latched on to the idea of smart growth as a ticket to economic renewal. Blue Island, a city of 24,200 concentrated in just 4.5 square miles, straddles several of the region's oldest rail lines. It takes only 24 minutes to get here on the Rock Island Line from downtown Chicago. Almost before I know it I'm scrambling to get off the train at the Vermont Street station, which was built in 1868 when Blue Island was little more than a collection of brickyards and a smattering of inns and taverns frequented by westward travelers.

SMART GROWTH IN CHICAGOLAND WILL DEPEND ON REJUVENATING PLACES LIKE BLUE ISLAND

Over time the brickyards made way for the steel industry and the railroads, and for decades the steel boom kept the economy of Chicago's southern suburbs afloat. As most of the steel mills closed in the 1980s, so did the related metal processing facilities. Blue Island was left with a skilled manufacturing workforce but not enough manufacturing jobs to go around. Today the industrial infrastructure remains intact: there are five freight rail lines, an intermodal freight terminal where containers are switched from train to barge or truck, and the Calumet-Sag Channel, which offers access to the Mississippi River. Yet it is all grossly underutilized.

Those are the very conditions that smart growth advocates like: the means for getting both people and goods off the roads and onto more efficient modes of transportation that are just waiting to be put to use again. There are no new train tracks to make way for: they've been here for more than 100 years. The story of smart growth in Chicagoland will depend on rejuvenating places like Blue Island. If businesses can locate here, close to downtown, where transportation is plentiful, energy-efficient, and cost-effective, they won't need to migrate to the suburban fringe, where land is cheap but the costs of sprawl and inefficient transportation are high.

City planner Jodi Prout has a strategy for Blue Island to reinvent itself as an appealing place to live and work, a plan that would carefully

reconfigure its built environment to put the pieces of everyday life in close proximity to one another. In her small office in City Hall, she unfurls maps and site plans. One shows the area around the Vermont Street station, where I'd been standing less than an hour earlier.

"It's a little crazy down there," Prout says, pointing to the spot where I'd hopped off the train. "There are all these businesses, and it's hard to figure out what to do." Her fingers flutter across the paper as she points to what is currently there (parking lots, a metal scrap yard, a machine shop, a cabinet maker, and a lamb processing plant) and describes what she would like to see in its place (shops, cafés, retail services, rental apartments, and condominiums). The challenge is to make Blue Island a place where new people and new businesses want to be without squelching the commercial operations that already exist. Move this here and that could go up there, and here we'd put the sorts of things that might make you want to hang around for a while, she says, resting her index finger near the spot where a lumber yard and the lamb processor now stand.

Among the many obstacles Prout will have to overcome is zoning. For the past 100 years, our zoning laws have offered a perverse incentive for sprawl. While it may seem absurd today to have laws that prevent apartments from being built on top of shops and cafés, they once made sense; our commercial businesses and urban problems have changed dramatically since Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* about the horrors of Chicago's stockyards.

FOR THE PAST 100 YEARS, OUR ZONING LAWS HAVE OFFERED A PERVERSE INCENTIVE FOR SPRAWL

"There were very real concerns in the early twentieth century, big problems with respect to crowding in urban areas. But crowding and density are two very different things," says Geoff Anderson, who helped start the Smart Growth Program at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the mid-1990s and is now director of Smart Growth America, a nonprofit advocacy organization. A century ago, residential and commercial development were physically segregated, he says, because "crowding led to sanitation issues, disease-promoting conditions. And there was a real danger of property values decreasing if someone set up a slaughterhouse next door. But *commercial* can apply to a slaughterhouse or a local pub—there is no distinction made—even though one is a hazard and the other is an amenity."

Prout started making an inventory of Blue Island's businesses a few years ago with the help of a Web-based mapping program called Full Circle. Devised by CMAP (the regional planning agency), it uses wireless GIS-enabled devices to collect data on the types of businesses that exist and where they're located relative to one another, to vacant storefronts, and to people who live and work nearby. This has allowed Prout to identify the sorts of businesses that the community needs as well as where, ideally, they should go. Community input and support will be vital, especially when it comes time to work with the city council on zoning changes.

"People don't necessarily need to know they're involved in smart growth," Prout says. "That's a label." The key, she explains, is to demonstrate a project's cost-saving benefits, health and environmental benefits, and cultural benefits. The blueprints for Blue Island's transformation were drawn up by the Center for Neighborhood Technology, a "think and do" tank that identified the city as a prime location for transportation-centered redevelopment. Now that Prout has her priorities in order, she's working to facilitate the relocation of industrial plants that currently sit where a mix of residential buildings, shops, and services ought to go. Then she can begin pushing for sidewalks and trees on the streets that connect the train station with Blue Island's historic downtown.

A perfect location for manufacturing or assembly plants would be an old landfill on the north side of town, sandwiched between the highway and the train tracks. Cargo trains already pass through, but mostly they "have little to do with the city," Prout says, "other than sitting and blocking traffic." Moving Vermont Street's industrial businesses here would put them just as close to the freight trains as they are now, and the workers who travel by commuter train would be able to catch a shuttle bus for a five-minute ride from the rail stop—or walk, if they chose to.

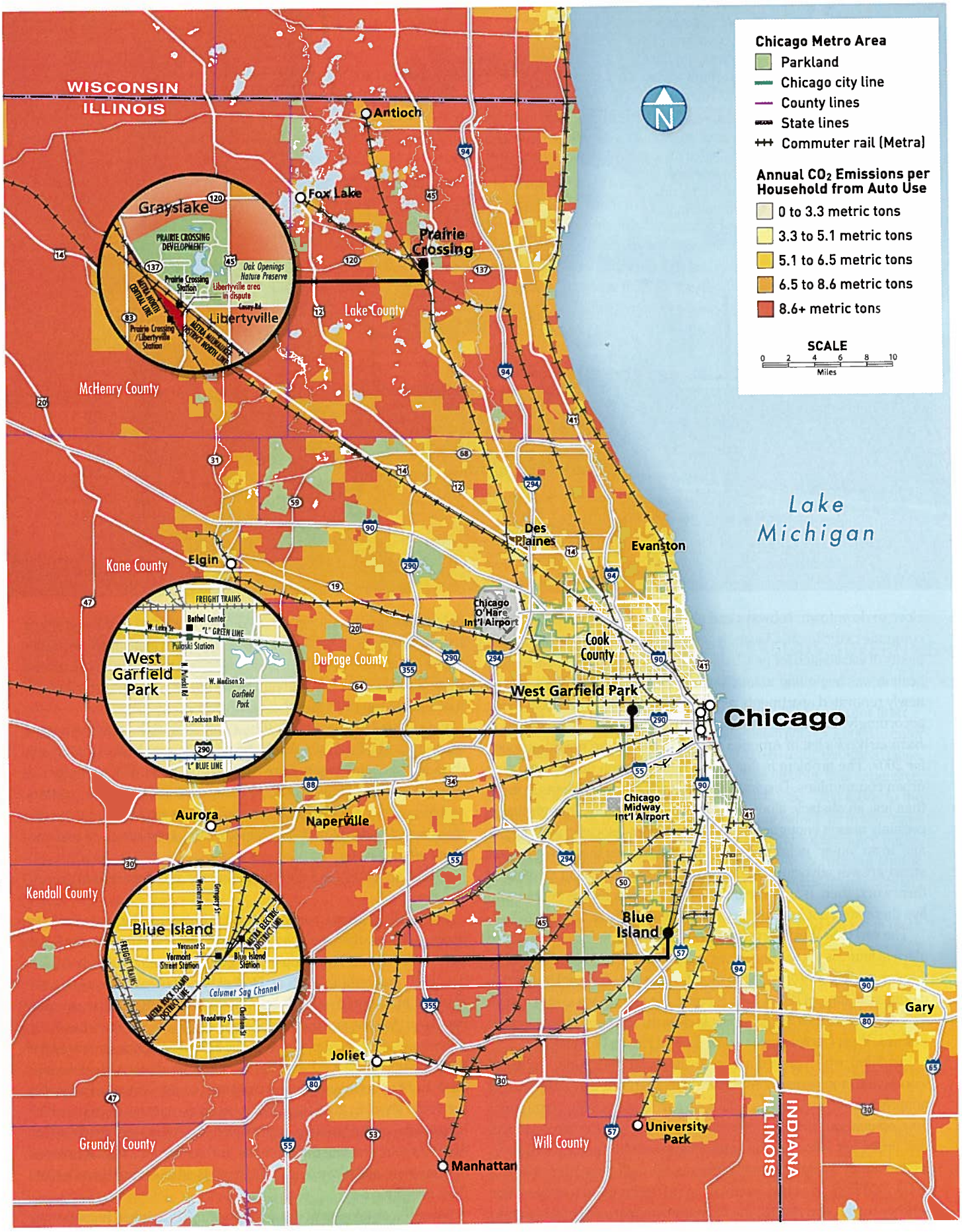
The landfill has become something of an obsession for Prout. She's spent the past several years working with the EPA and applying for grant money from the agency to clean up the site, and she is now overseeing the remediation herself while marketing the spot to potential businesses. For years, nobody wanted to build on top of abandoned industrial sites, or brownfields, since that meant inheriting financial liability for whatever mess was lying beneath the ground after decades of scarcely regulated operations. But despite the cost of remediation, Prout sees brownfields as an asset. Rising energy costs and concern over global warming, as well as the time and money lost by putting goods on trucks that travel on ever more clogged roadways, are making fringe locations less appealing.

Prout says that green businesses have so far shown the most interest, owing in no small part to Chicago's efforts to establish itself as something of a green mecca. Interested parties include a wind energy company, a composting company, and a waste-to-energy plasma facility. Already Christy Webber Landscapes, a company that builds many of Chicago's green roofs, has set up shop on 119th Street, close to the landfill on the Blue Island side of the city line. And Blue Island is rather proud of that.

WEST GARFIELD PARK

Relics of a city that grew up tough and fast are scattered across Chicagoland, and though they may give the appearance of despair and desolation, they are also, depending on your perspective, building blocks. That's precisely what I find when I visit a neighborhood even more down on its luck than Blue Island: West Garfield Park, in the heart of Chicago's West Side, where crime, drugs, poverty, unemployment, and failing public schools are far more apparent than any vision of smart growth.

And yet in recent years developers have begun to eye blighted neighborhoods like this because of their built-in assets: they're



SMALLWORLD MAPS; CO2 DATA COURTESY OF CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD TECHNOLOGY © 2009

close to downtown; subways and elevated trains make for a speedy commute to the Loop, Chicago's central business district; and there's plenty of vacant land for new buildings. Until the recession hit, gentrification was beginning to touch places like West Garfield Park, with newly renovated apartments replacing derelict ones and rents rising accordingly. Its neighbor, East Garfield Park, was even named to *BusinessWeek*'s list of America's top up-and-coming neighborhoods for 2007. The problem is that urban renewal often disrupts existing urban communities. Displacement of low-income residents is more than just an obstacle along the path to social equity, though that is certainly reason enough to care. Every person relocated from an "inner" to an "outer" neighborhood only accentuates the problems that smart growth advocates are trying to reverse. A critical element of their work, then, is to make inner cities function for the people who live there now, not just for the newcomers they hope to attract.

The way to fit West Garfield Park into Chicagoland's smarter, more efficient future is not to bring in new condos and fancy stores like Prairie Crossing's Paper Stories, or to look for a new residential-industrial-commercial mix, as Blue Island is doing. It comes down to jobs and affordable housing that will keep people close to transit and other services. For this, West Garfield turns to the likes of Kresta Randolph.

Randolph, who has lived her entire life on the West Side, is a social worker and employment coordinator at Bethel New Life, a faith-based nonprofit group well known in Chicago for its pioneering community development work. She was born in 1971, just three years after the riots that broke out following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. left her family's neighborhood in flames. She still remembers playing in Garfield Park as a child, catching fish at the lily pond with her older brother. Later, she recalls, the drinking fountains stopped spouting water and the flowerbeds began to disappear. Today Randolph lives in the leafy and historic suburb of Oak Park, where her three children have safe streets to walk and play in and the schools provide proper care for her middle child, a 13-year-old daughter who has learning disabilities. If West Garfield had those things, she says, she'd gladly move back. But right now that still seems pretty far off.

On a Monday morning in July, I find Randolph standing next to a printer at the back of a small classroom in the Bethel Center, surrounded by six teenagers from the neighborhood. They are part of a city-sponsored program that helps young adults become peer mentors, and today they are learning how to find jobs for friends and family members. Randolph peppers the kids with questions as documents spool off the printer.

"Who has hospitals? Shopping centers and department stores? Restaurants?"

The skylit room is clean and bright, with an interior glass wall that looks out over office cubicles and windows that face Pulaski Road, where the Green Line stops. The building itself, which is LEED-certified, was built in 2005 by Bethel New Life on a plot of vacant land—a brownfield—that it bought from the city. There are solar panels on the roof, and the second-floor employment center has direct access to the elevated platform at the Pulaski station. At street level the building houses other neighborhood services: a local savings bank and a government-funded child care center, as well as a Subway sandwich shop. In 2006 the EPA honored the city of Chicago, which helped finance the building, with its National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, praising the center as "the anchor for a transit-oriented development and a key step in the revitalization of the West Garfield Park neighborhood."

Since the employment center opened in 1985, it has helped some 7,000 area residents find jobs, some for the first time in their lives.

That number includes not just teenagers and young adults, but also ex-offenders like Kenneth James and single mothers like Shanel Peterson, whose hours as a cashier were cut at Bed Bath & Beyond. Thanks to Randolph, both found full-time jobs with benefits at American MediConnect, a call center for the health care industry. Peterson has a good track record after several months with the company, Randolph tells me proudly, and James has moved on to a higher paying job.

"For a single mom, here's an opportunity to live with your four kids, even on minimum wage at $8.75 an hour. But to do that, she needs to be close to transit," Randolph says. American MediConnect's office is about to be moved downtown, and Peterson, who works the second shift, says she'll be able to take the Green Line to work rather than spending money on gas or waiting for an unreliable bus.

Randolph runs a job-skills orientation session once a month. Some people find the employment center through flyers posted around the neighborhood, some through probation officers, and some, like Peterson, just get off the train, look up, and see the sign.

Randolph, a fashionably dressed woman with carefully applied eyeliner and spiraling curls that shine in the sunlight, gives me a no-bull explanation of how job hunting works. There's more to it than learning professional skills or finding the job itself. Just as important is making sure that getting to and from work is possible and affordable.

"These are desperate times," she says. "I'm regularly telling people that they may have to commute for an hour and a half on public transportation. It may be that the job is in the suburbs and they have to take four buses to get there." That same commute might be faster by car, but car ownership shouldn't have to be a prerequisite for finding a good job. "I also have to think about what their commute will be like when it's cold outside," she adds. "I need to be sure that all of the pieces are in place."

Randolph is always on the lookout for new employers, introducing herself as a reliable third-party verifier for a company's hiring needs. She recently started to compile a list of potential employers who offer entry-level green jobs, such as energy-efficiency retrofitting, because she thinks they may be open to hiring ex-offenders. The list now includes 25 companies. "I think they'll be hot jobs for the next several years," she says. "Changing out the lightbulbs, disposing of waste properly."

In a nearby classroom, students are returning to their computers, preparing to share the fruits of the morning's labor. Randolph bounds in and claps her hands. She smiles at a petite 17-year-old named Brittany Delaney and asks brightly, "Who've you got a job for, your BFF?"

Yes, a friend, Delaney replies.

What's the job? *Cashier at an AMC movie theater.*

Where's it located? *Downtown on Michigan Avenue.*

Where's your friend live? *K-Town* [a neighborhood just south of West Garfield].

What would her hours be like? Could she take public transportation? Would that be safe? *Yes. She'd get out at 9. That would be safe.*

Good, Randolph says. She should apply for that job today, not tomorrow, when it could be gone. You see an opportunity, you take it.

After the students file out for lunch, our conversation shifts back to Kenneth James and Shanel Peterson. What worries Randolph is how to keep such people in the neighborhood. How long until the $600-a-month apartments give way to new condos and more locals are forced out? When that happens, she says, "I have no idea where they're going."

No one does. We're not very good at figuring out where people drift off to, but when the goal is to promote livability, diversity, and comfortable density in cities, displacing people from neighborhoods that are already compact and efficient makes no sense. Which is why Bethel's efforts to bring affordable housing, good schools, and other community services to West Garfield Park is such an important ingredient in creating a more sustainable Chicagoland.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

The communities I visited face a variety of challenges: a tough job market, antiquated zoning laws, our continuing attachment to the automobile. Even more challenging is connecting the dots between these places, and between them and the rest of Chicagoland's independent cities and suburbs. Making these deliberate, functional connections is likely to require alternative transportation options that don't exist in most American towns. In Chicago, walking and biking long distances in the dead of winter simply won't work, and the city's sprawling suburban communities and office parks are not well served by a regional rail network that was designed to meet nineteenth-century needs. If you have to travel from one suburb to the next, what happens if they aren't both on the same line? Are you prepared to go into the city center first?

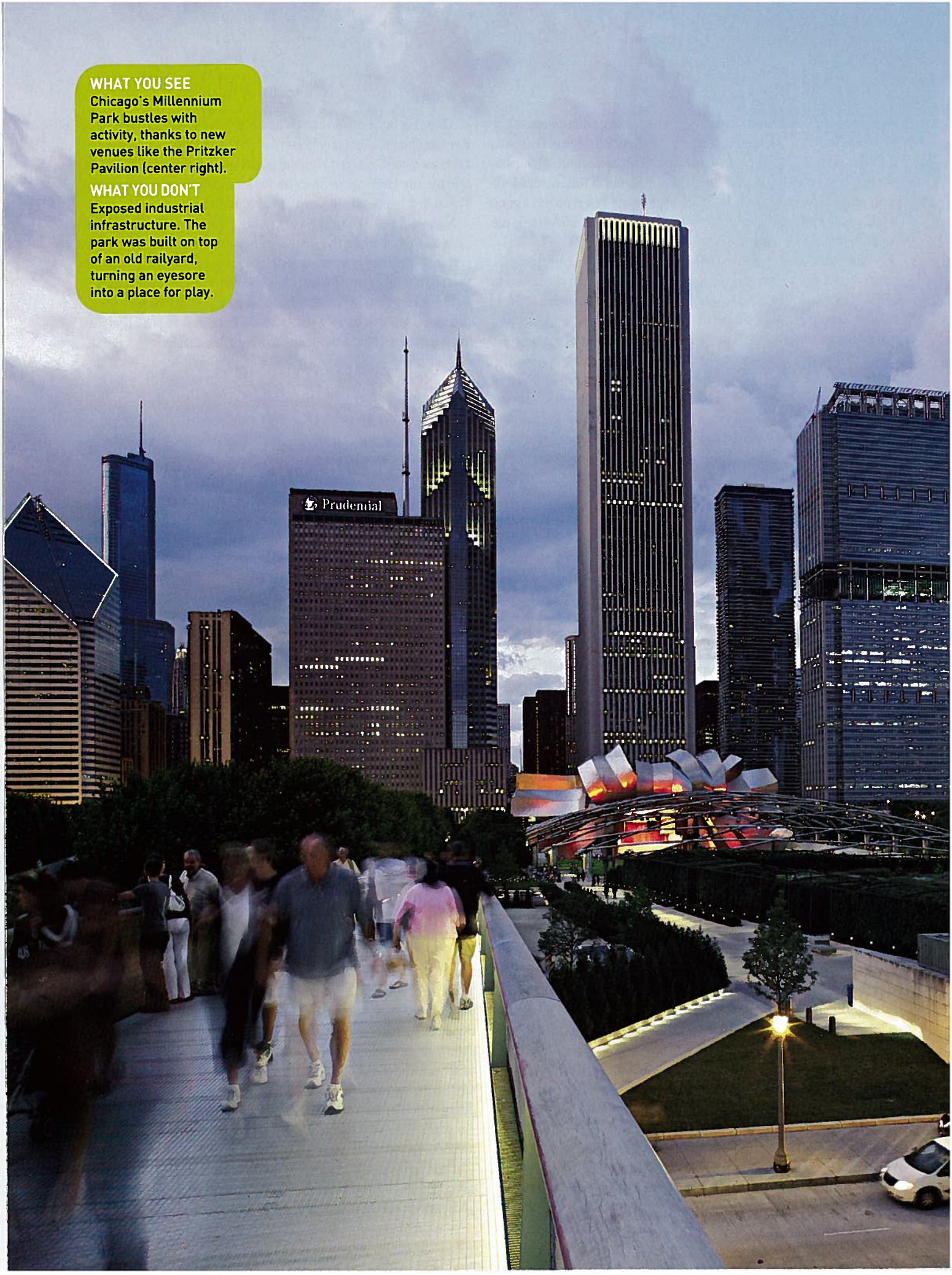
REVERSING SPRAWL REQUIRES A PATCHWORK OF SOLUTIONS AT EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT

That's where state and regional transportation agencies need to enter the picture, with services such as express buses using dedicated lanes, known as bus rapid transit, which are more flexible, less expensive, and faster to implement than new rail transit [see "Hop a Bus to the Future," p. 15]. In places like Prairie Crossing, which lie in the midst of suburban regions that are home to many corporate office parks, individual companies have begun to play a role by running shuttle buses to commuter rail stops, cutting their employees' travel costs and reducing personal car use.

But reversing the economic incentives that led to sprawl is more complex. It still isn't universally understood that undeveloped land on the suburban fringe is not as cheap as it appears. Reversing sprawl will require a patchwork of solutions at every level of government.

Some of Chicago's solutions will come from CMAP, the regional planning agency, backed by Chicago Metropolis 2020. The group is headed by Prairie Crossing's George Ranney, who intends to replicate the strategies that guided the second phase of that development in other Chicagoland communities. The goal of Metropolis 2020, he says, is to improve quality of life so that people want to live in Chicago, which in turn makes businesses want to locate there so they can attract the best talent. That, he says, is what will make Chicago a viable, competitive metropolis through "2020 and beyond."

It all comes down to smart growth. "Planning is critical," Ranney says. "Build your new developments around transportation and put your workforce housing near jobs, rather than creating scenarios



WHAT YOU SEE
Chicago's Millennium Park bustles with activity, thanks to new venues like the Pritzker Pavilion (center right).

WHAT YOU DON'T
Exposed industrial infrastructure. The park was built on top of an old railyard, turning an eyesore into a place for play.

where workers are priced out of one area and find themselves forced to drive two or three hours [to work]."

The imperative of fitting together those two pieces—transportation and housing—is what led Ranney and Metropolis 2020 to push the state of Illinois to create CMAP, combining two agencies that had addressed transportation and land-use planning separately. "Without that kind of agency for making decisions about where investments should go, you're simply not going to deal with sprawl," he says. "Growth spinning out of control in the newer suburbs—roads, sewers, schools—means you don't have that money to spend in the cities and older suburbs. So they decline and people go farther out."

The challenge, explains Randy Blankenhorn, CMAP's executive director, is "how we make the city of Chicago work differently in the inner suburbs than the outer suburbs." Nobody expects Prairie Crossing to sprout 40-story apartment buildings, though some carefully planned increase in density is a goal. The problem is that to the uninitiated, the word *density* suggests crowding rather than efficiency, he says. "We're trying to say that in some communities, more dense development means four flats near your train station. That's all. What we really want to do is build suburban downtowns where people want to be—a thriving, vibrant, and attractive downtown that's got open space, business, entertainment, and transportation."

CMAP and groups like Chicago's Metropolitan Mayors' Caucus (in which Blue Island's mayor, Donald Peloquin, is an active participant) play crucial roles in leading by example and coordinating the good efforts of many municipalities. But they cannot overcome the immutable fact that land-use decisions are controlled by local governments, whose archaic zoning laws have slowed smart growth plans in Prairie Crossing and Blue Island.

Where there is an absence of inspired local leadership, there is LEED-ND, which functions as a sort of do-it-yourself kit for smart growth, including how-tos for working with zoning boards. So far, it's the closest thing to a one-size-fits-all solution, providing a list of essential ingredients for developers and government officials who don't have a custom-made smart growth plan of their own. Kaid Benfield, who directs NRDC's smart growth program, has spent much of the past decade working toward the creation of LEED-ND as a solution to what George Ranney and others underscore as the ultimate problem: the absence of a coherent plan.

It's not just local and regional governments whose lack of planning has favored sprawl. Lack of coordination and foresight also afflicts the federal agencies that determine how taxpayer dollars will be spent. The Department of Transportation (DOT) does not consider how the roads we build today will influence development in the future. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will not fund affordable housing projects on brownfield sites—and inner-city America has a lot of them—because its definition of "clean" is different from that used by the EPA, which oversees brownfield remediation. What's more, the Federal Housing Authority's subsidized home-loan program doesn't consider location and transportation when determining whether a prospective buyer can afford a mortgage. Banks say that 30 percent of a family's annual income is a reasonable amount to spend on housing, but the math doesn't work if you have to foot the bill for two family cars and enough gas for a two-hour commute to work.

Last June, as I was preparing to visit Chicago, the Obama administration announced plans to establish a HUD-DOT-EPA task force, knocking down the barriers to smart growth caused by inadequate interagency cooperation. Although Washington cannot force municipal governments to follow coordinated plans for land use and local development, money is a powerful incentive, and the task force aims to channel the flow of dollars to projects that focus on smart growth goals.

"There are a lot of reasons to coordinate transportation investments with housing, water infrastructure, and economic development," says Beth Osborne, deputy assistant secretary for transportation policy at DOT and a member of the new task force. "It costs all governments less money because it requires less infrastructure investment." Funneling federal housing dollars toward residential projects near transit leads to lower household transportation costs, and creating walkable neighborhoods means fewer dollars spent on roads and other infrastructure. "We're getting more bang for your buck," Osborne says, if "we make sure that money is targeted toward those communities that find a way to coordinate."

WHAT WE REALLY WANT TO DO IS BUILD SUBURBAN DOWNTOWNS WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO BE

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

On my last day in Chicago, I paid a visit to City Hall to see Sadhu Johnston, deputy chief of staff for Mayor Richard Daley and the person responsible for all environmental initiatives within the city limits. (Shortly after our meeting, Johnston left to become deputy city manager for Vancouver, British Columbia, another metropolis commited to sustainable development.)

"We're not in a position to mandate how people act," Johnston said. But there are specific, concrete things a city can do to make green options attractive. This is where Chicago gets it right, with places like Millennium Park, miles of bike lanes, and congestion-busting initiatives such as raising street parking prices to encourage the use of public transportation. Johnston was a driving force behind the city's green roof initiative, part of Chicago's plan for mitigating and adapting to climate change. He seemed eager to show off his work, so we rode the elevator to the top floor and climbed a set of stairs to the roof. It took a moment to adjust to the strangeness of standing on top of an 11-story building, surrounded by grasses and flowering plants. There was even a beehive up there.

It was beautiful, and that was part of the point. In the end, no matter how many rules are changed and how much money is shuffled around, people have to want to live, work, and play in the efficient downtowns that planners are struggling to create. "Our first strategy is to make Chicago the most wonderful place it can be so that people want to live here, want to move here, want to keep their families here," Johnston said. "Smart growth is about making cities incredible places."